DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 589 FL 800 480

AUTHOR Leavitt, Robert M.
TITLE Escuchando no mas (Just by Listening): A Report on Sabbatical Year Activities in Bolivia (January 24 to April 1, 1991).
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 20p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aymara; *Bilingual Education; Elementary Secondary Education; Feminism; Foreign Countries; Independent Study; *Indigenous Populations; *Literacy Education; Phonology; *Relevance (Education); Rural Areas; Sabbatical Leaves; Uncommonly Taught Languages; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS Andean Oral History Workshop; *Bolivia; Uchumataqa

ABSTRACT

A college faculty member reports on a sabbatical project in Bolivia, in which he shared ideas about bilingual and bicultural education in indigenous communities and helped with four activities of the Andean Oral History Workshop: (1) the self-education of a group of women aged 18-70 who decided to explore together issues such as rights, education, textiles, unions, and health as they relate to women; (2) the training of a small group of rural teachers interested in experimenting with bilingual and bicultural education at the elementary and junior high school levels; (3) the writing of a booklet about Aymara phonology to be used in teaching literacy to speakers and non-speakers of Aymara; and (4) development of a dictionary and teaching materials for the Uchumataqa language spoken by the Uru people. The experience is related in narrative form and includes a diary entry about a visit to a native community and a ceremony that occurs there. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (MSE)

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ED345589

Escuchando no más

Just by Listening

A Report on Sabbatical Year Activities in Bolivia

24 January to 01 April 1991

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INTRODUCTION

For the past twenty years, I have been collaborating with native Indian teachers and students to explore ways of improving education in their schools. What is a culturally appropriate education? How do we foster ways of teaching and learning that partake of the natural patterns of interaction in homes and communities? In order for native students to succeed in school, which for many of them is an essentially alien institution, we must do more than simply introduce native «content» into the curriculum; where teachers have adopted native methodology and values these students have come to understand their own identity and potential. In the last few years I have been thinking about ways in which teachers might learn the culture of their students and make use of it (this would apply in the case of any students) in such a way that learning in the classroom is as much as possible like learning outside it. There children know what they want to do and how to go about it. All we need to do is watch and listen.

In 1988 I attended a native education conference, Análisis de Alternativas Educacionales y Culturales para la Población Altiplánica (Analysis of Educational and Cultural Alternatives for the Altiplano[1] Population [in this case, Aymara[2]]), held at the Universidad de Tarapacá, in Arica, Chile. At the conference I presented a paper based on experiences in Maine and the Maritime Provinces, entitled «To Live Within, to Know from Without: Bilingual and Bicultural Education». I met a number of people working in Aymara education in northern Chile; La Paz, Bolivia; and Puno, Perú. I also went briefly to La Paz, where I visited at the Museum of Ethnology and Folklore; the Institute of Aymara Language and Culture; and the Andean Oral History Workshop (THOA[3]). This last group is collecting and publishing oral history in Aymara communities, both rural and urban, in the Altiplano. They were then beginning to explore ways in which the knowledge and traditions they are recording might be useful in the education of Aymara children. I continued to correspond with them after my return from South America, in November 1988, and arranged a return visit for the winter of 1991.

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About twelve people are conducting research and writing at THOA; all speak either Aymara or Quechua as a first language, in addition to Spanish. Many are part-time university students in anthropology, history, or linguistics. Others, including the director, are university graduates — in linguistics and sociology, respectively. THOA has published or has in preparation several books on the roles of the traditional authorities and leaders in Aymara communities, and others, such as a book of Quechua tales and one of Aymara myths from the Lake Titicaca region. Other THOA publications include accounts of the popular struggles against the legacies of European and North American colonialism, particularly the role of women in these struggles, based on interviews with elders and archival research; and a methodology of oral history, which is of use to historians everywhere.[4]

One of THOA's chief accomplishments has been to gain recognition for a culture and history vital to contemporary Bolivian society. Like so much that is indigenous in the country, these have had primarily private, not public, acceptance. (One has only to compare the political situation: although they constitute two-thirds of the population, indigenous peoples are virtually unrepresented in the Bolivian government.)

The research and writing are carefully monitored and evaluated by the group as a whole and reviewed by colleagues from the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA), in La Paz, and by experts in Aymara and Quechua writing. THOA researchers also write and produce Aymara-language radio programs, from two-minute spots like «Today in History» to serialized radionovelas, in which nearly everyone takes part as an actor. One staff member, who has written a book on the nature of Aymara communities (soon to be published), and who is responsible for THOA's work with rural teachers, the group is now offering its expertise to schools. In the course of their research they have watched and listened so carefully that communities and individuals are beginning to come to them with ideas — precisely as happens in good mutual teaching and learning, in or out of school.

The purpose of my visit was to share ideas about bilingual and bicultural education in indigenous communities and to help out with four activities THOA has recently undertaken.

1 the *autoformación* (self-education) of a group of women, ages 18 to 70, who have decided to explore together issues such as rights, education, textiles, unions, and health as they relate to women;

2 the training of a small group of rural teachers who are interested in experimenting with bilingual and bicultural education at the elementary and junior high school level;

3 the writing of a booklet about Aymara phonology to be used in teaching literacy to speakers and non-speakers of Aymara (several staff members are also engaged in linguistic research);

4 the development of a dictionary and teaching materials for the Uchumataqu language, spoken by the Uru people.[5]

On 24 January I arrived at THOA and met at THOA to discuss my activities during the coming weeks.[6] As we talked about bilingual and bicultural education, the director took an immediate interest in the idea that children can participate in and set the agenda for their own education.

AYMARA, QUECHUA, AND URU WOMEN: LEARNING AND WRITING TOGETHER

Adults, too, can participate in and set the agenda for their own education. This is true of the ten women engaged in *autoformación*, who have decided what tasks they will take on and how they will develop their roles as community leaders and promoters of Aymara, Quechua, or Uru culture. Some have never attended school, others dropped out in the early grades, very few have completed junior or senior high school. The youngest women have enroled in evening classes in La Paz to complete their basic education. The eldest speak Aymara, with only a minimal, passive knowledge of Spanish. A few are THOA employees; the others discovered THOA through friends or relatives working there.

When I arrived, the women had already met and chosen topics they wanted to explore individually, with support from the group — rights, education, textiles, trade unions, and health. We decided that a good place to begin the work would be with the group members' «educational autobiographies», an assignment which would combine the women's interest in producing a written account of their experiences with my interest in how they accomplished their out-of-school learning. It is important to the women that their writing be published and valued. Experiences like theirs are the norm in most of Bolivia, but the depth of knowledge and understanding attained through family, home, and community teaching — that is to say, through the oral tradition and participation in the work of adults — have not been recognized.

We began by planning with the members of the group a three-day writers' workshop at the THOA offices, at which the participants would share orally and in writing accounts of what they had learned as children and young women and how they had learned it. The objectives were stated in the workshop agenda as follows:

1 to explore the system of teaching and learning which has existed for centuries in indigenous communities;

2 to share personal experiences in this system and in the formal (state) education system;

3 to write about these experiences; and

4 to plan activities which will meet needs of young people today — for example, activities with schoolchildren or further research by group members.

We introduced the topic using a number of questions[7] which focused on the early learning of skills such as weaving, cooking, shepherding, caring for children, selling, and their acquisition of other knowledge, relating to cures, stories, rituals, natural indicators of weather and crop yield, effects of lightning. The women wrote notes for themselves and then gave oral accounts to the group of their experiences. Their colleagues asked questions and made comments based upon their own childhood experiences. Then the participants took time to write. Later they shared what they had written by reading aloud and developed the accounts with further details. Each writer then took her manuscript home for two weeks. The group reconvened on Friday, 15 March, for a one-day editing session, in which each writer outlined the topics treated in her manuscript and the group made suggestions for organizing and further elaborating the content. The group also discussed possible ways of organizing a book to include all the authors' contributions. The sessions were conducted in Spanish to the extent possible, this being the only language common to all the participants, except the women who spoke only Aymara and Uchumataqu. Aymara was used fairly extensively, usually with a summary provided in Spanish by another participant.

The workshops were lively and full. So much time was spent exchanging ideas during the day that the writers had to use the evenings to prepare their manuscripts for sharing and discussion. (And, as a result, the fourth objective, including the sharing of participants' aspirations for young women today, was not addressed.)

Two elders, both from the Uru community of Iro Hito, talked about the changes which had occurred since their childhoods, when the people of the community had managed their own system of justice, had spoken freely with the earth and the rocks, and had woven and worn subdued fabrics of natural colours. (Bright colours at that time were reserved for certain festive occasions, and it was not until the influx of many Aymara women into the community that dress changed.) Girls learned by playing and — as continually reiterated by the workshop participants — just by watching (*mirando no más*) how to weave and cook in order to contribute to the

household work. One of these women said that she was taught to do these tasks for others, not for herself. She had to keep up with her responsibilities in order to be allowed to attend school like her step-brother — though this was against her mother's wishes. By the time she reached third grade, her mother would say, «*Ya sabes escribir, ¿qué más quieres?* — You already know how to write. What more do you want?» She left school and did not return. The other woman, the eldest member of the group, was told as a child, «You are Uru; school is not for you».

The other members in turn related their experiences. A young woman of Iro Hito, from the age of six, was managing fishing boats on the Desaguedero River. If she fell in the water, she knew to eat a bit of mud from the bottom so as not to leave her spirit in the lake's possession. Later, with much difficulty and perseverance, she learned how to spin and knit. She learned how to show respect to elders and not to cry when she was out in the pampas away from her home. She developed a sense of maturity, responsibility and persistence.

Another young Uru woman was fishing at a very early age and walking five hours to Jesús de Machaca to help sell the catch. She pastured the family's llamas. As time went on, she learned to weave many types of tejidos, each from a different teacher. She recalls how young children taught one another: muéstrame y yo te mostraré — show me and I'll show you. She became familiar with the calls of the tiki-tiki in the totora reeds, who predicts the weather — and of other birds who foretell visits or deaths. In those days, her family saw school as a place for boys, but now her mother (the elder, above, who was not allowed to attend school) has encouraged her to complete her schooling.

At five, a young Quechua woman and her cousins had responsibilities as shepherds. By eight she was weaving *awayus* with animal figures and teaching her younger siblings. She had learned how to comport herself as a young woman, and, even though girls weren't usually sent to school, «my mother was not like that». But it was difficult for her to stay, because girls had so much more to do at home than boys. «*No hay que jugar mucho, vas a tener wawas*», said her mother. «No need to play a lot, you're going to have babies».

Another Quechua woman, as a middle sister caring for the younger children, was taught to fear places away from her house and outside the community. Once she took the younger children out to walk in the fields beyond the village — only to be caught and drenched by the rain. She attended school secretly, against her mother's wishes. Once found out, she received her parents' support, at first, but she went no further than grade two. «*Vas volviendo floja*», they said. «You're getting soft. Textile designs and figures are our writing». She learned about the history of her community by

participating in the rituals defining its territory and boundaries, in preparation for paying a tribute to the city of Potosí (by the time of her childhood the actual payment had been abolished).

One woman was raised by her grandmother, who closely supervised her moral education, teaching her to erase the signs of her play from the sand, to pray in Quechua, and to prepare herself for marriage. She and her friends played at adult responsibilities, the girl wives cooking and taking food to the boy miners. She enjoyed taking part with other children in religious festivals, especially ones like the feast of Santa Anita, which seemed aimed at children with its miniature foods and lead coins cast in cakes of soap for use just during the fiesta. Today, she enjoys being with children and working with them, and she has continued her studies uninterrupted.

As oldest daughter, a fourth Quechua woman was her mother's right hand. She cooked for her parents, and early on was traveling to ferias — weekly village markets — at four o'clock in the morning to trade, sell, and buy. Her father was very demanding about her cooking (she once had to eat a meal she had burned), but she is grateful to him today for the care and joy with which she prepares food. She learned to peel the bark from eucalyptus logs with a hammer and chisel to use for firewood. Her parents wanted her to be well versed in both city and country skills so that she wouldn't suffer when married.

An Aymara elder talked about the difficulty of her childhood, of the poverty and separation her family suffered after the death of her father. At 5:00 a.m. she was out in the fields gathering frozen chuñu — freeze-dried potatoes — in her skirt. Her only close friend was another girl with whom she shepherded. She did not go to school but has always seen the value of education and has fought for schooling to be provided in communities with few children.

Her daughter, also attending the workshop, told how she learned not to steal or lie, and not to whistle — all improper conduct. She learned that playing or sitting or sleeping in a place struck by lightning would bring on sickness. She learned to tell time by the stars. When it had been dry for a long time, she would gather all the children of the village together, and they would stay outdoors from late at night until early morning shouting to the sky for rain. She later became a prosperous *comerciante,* fond of the income and the finery. But she has given up all this in order to resume her self-education and to work towards her objective, *que las mujeres se convirtan en una* — that women become one. The decision ended her marriage, her husband saying, «*Estás muerta para mí* — You are dead to me».

These women have learned about the continuity of their communities and the ways in which their people maintain life and culture. They are experts in

the skills and knowledge required to survive on the Altiplano and in Bolivian society. As the workshop progressed they continued to surprise themselves with the extent of their understanding, and they kept adding new topics to write about and investigate. Their confidence and interest grew, too, and they began to see their way into more complex research on the topics — rights, education, textiles, unions, health — they had selected for study. It seemed that reflecting on their own education, in a broad sense, had helped them see the power of their own, personal resources.

RURAL TEACHERS: AYMARA IN THE CLASSROOM

The population of virtually all of the communities surrounding La Paz is Aymara-speaking, even in Iro Hito, the Uru village. A number of the rural teachers have been working with THOA to develop culturally appropriate methods and materials to use with children whose first, and in some cases only, language is Aymara, and who have not generally experienced success in the formal, Spanish-only settings of the rural schools.[8] A group of these teachers has formed the Cultural Centre for the Teachers of Aroma Province (CCMPA) in order to share ideas about making their teaching more culturally appropriate. One of them, who has a combined grade one and two class in Cuchinitos, a small community half an hour's bicycle ride from Patacamaya, taught his class bilingually last year — first-language Aymara literacy in the mornings and second-language Spanish skills in the afternoons. He was using some of the Aymara readers which have been produced by UNICEF, but otherwise developed his own lessons, activities, and materials. Another teacher, who lives in Iro Hito (Ingavi Province) but teaches sciences at the intermediate level in the neighbouring community of Jankoaqi Abajo, has had his students conducting interviews and writing about natural medicines as a way of introducing Aymara culture into the curriculum.

I had a chance to work with these two men and with a grade five teacher from Aroma Province, during a workshop which the THOA *responsable* and I held at the THOA offices in La Paz. A week later, we met with a larger group from CCMPA, in Patacamaya, in order to extend to them the possibility of developing Aymara-language materials through continuing work with THOA; these men had their first follow-up meeting in on Sunday, 17 March.

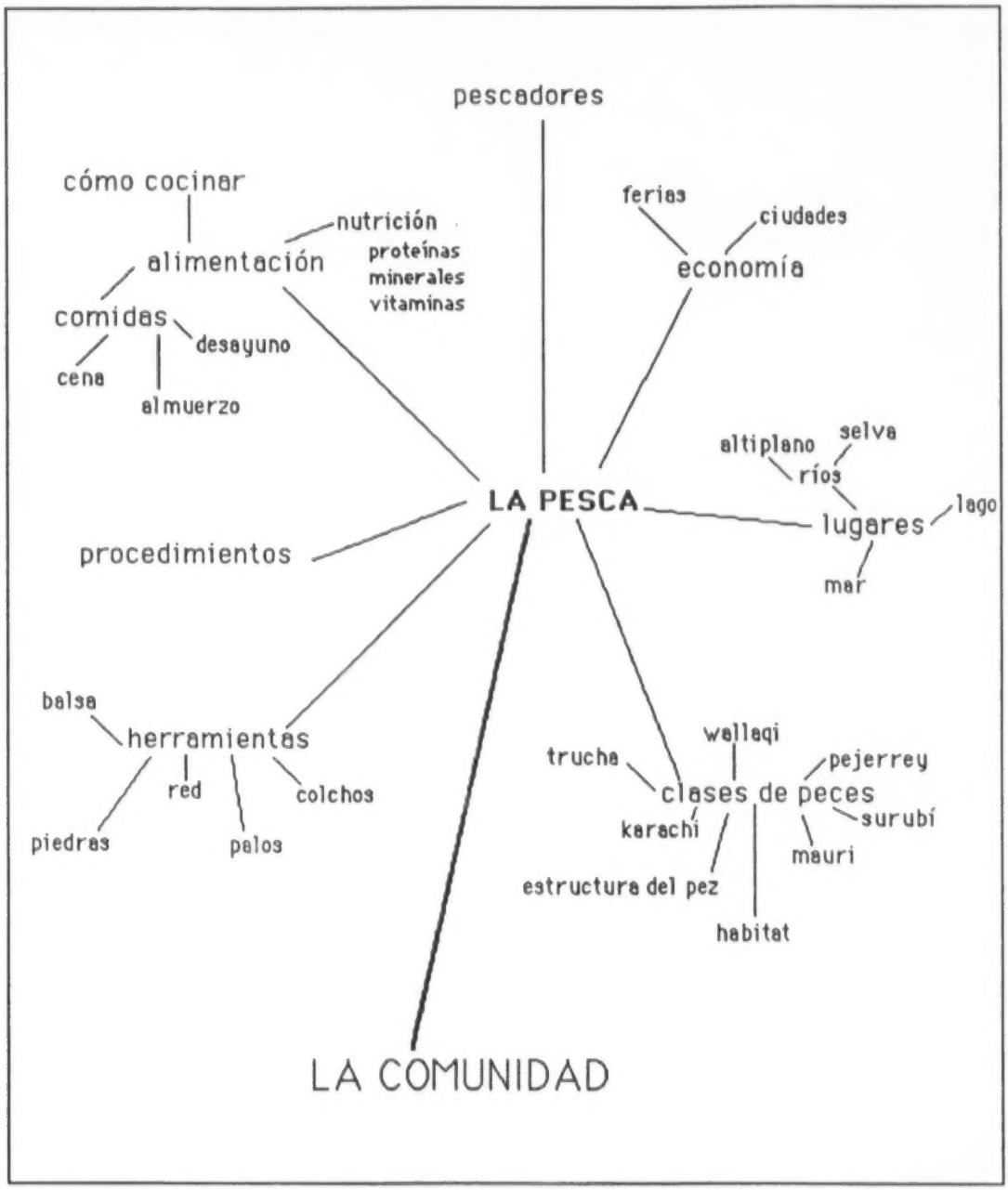
The workshop had three objectives. First, it would provide a forum in which the participants could talk about their experiences as Aymara or Uru teachers working with indigenous pupils in the formal school setting and I could talk to them about similar situations in Canada. Second, we would address such pædagogical topics as the adaptation of the school program to the culture of the community, methodology for bilingual education, and the design and use of teaching materials. Finally, throughout the week, the teachers would be writing and illustrating Aymara stories for their classes — later to be published in booklet form by THOA.

As it turned out we did indeed manage to meet the three objectives, but in a manner much more informal than that suggested by our precise schedule — as I should have predicted from many similar encounters at home. The teachers quickly defined their central interest: how to use children's initiatives and the knowledge they bring to school in order to build a bilingual and/or bicultural program. I told them that such a progam follows securely from listening and responding to what the children are saying: respecting both the language they are using and the questions and comments they come up with. This confirmed many of their own instincts about teaching and I was able to share with them a number of suggestions for achieving their goals.

The teachers see the government's present program of rural education as an obstacle in what one of them called *la lucha de los campesinos*, the [political] struggle of the rural population. The official materials are not easily understood by the children, many of whom come to school speaking only Aymara. (We were shown the grade two text/workbook, which includes in one volume a year's work in all subjects.[9]) At the same time, however, parents are hesitant to accept bilingual education: they want their children to learn Spanish so that they can cope with Euro-Bolivian society. (The same dilemma faces Indian parents here in Canada: how to educate children so that they are comfortable and competent in both cultures.) The teacher from Cuchinitos says that as a result of having been forbidden to speak Aymara in school he has been inspired to work toward education that truly serves the community, «*para que mi hijo sepa más que yo en aymara y también castellano* — so that my child will know more than I do in both Aymara and Spanish». The two languages must complement each other.

The teachers also addressed the content of a bilingual/bicultural education. None wants to teach physics, for example, in Aymara, but neither do they want to limit what is taught to «folklore»; that would be patronizing. Instead, as we continued our discussions through the week, they came to see how using Aymara is a good way for the children to study their own community — the culture they live within — and, beyond that, the expanding context of the world around them. We also looked at ways of developing a curriculum based on community study, in particular how to create curriculum «webs», like the diagram on the following page, which is based on fishing in the community of Iro Hito.

One of the main activities of the workshop — and the one which we later proposed to the other teachers at Patacamaya — was writing traditional stories in Aymara for children. The teachers, much like the group of women, told their stories aloud to one another, then wrote them down (again, like the



CURRICULUM WEB:
FISHING IN IRO HITO

women, adding more details in response to comments from the others). one told about the Fox and the Ducklings; another was a classical tale of the origins of the Aymara world. On the next day, they retold and rewrote them and finally illustrated them. The stories were typed on the Macintosh to be compiled for publication. We also looked at the use of stories in the classroom. We agreed that stories exemplify the values and point of view of a culture, the knowledge, attitudes, and ways of speaking unique to the people who tell them. Stories are also a storehouse of data about the language itself, vocabulary, grammar, and idioms, at all levels of formality. They provoke discussion, and they incite children to collect and write their own.

The teachers also addressed the teaching of both Spanish and Aymara oral language to young children, spending some time developing an activity — putting on a special meal for parents — and thinking about sentence patterns which might develop from the talk that accompanies preparations, cooking, serving, and cleanup. In Spanish, for example, *¿Cómo hemos preparado la comida? — R. limpió el pescado. Ch. trajo agua. A. cortó la papa. F. cocinó la sopa. Z. puso la mesa.* (How did we prepare the meal? — R. cleaned the fish. Ch. carried water. A. cut the potatoes. F. cooked the soup. Z. set the table.)

On the final day, one of the teachers asked me to share some ideas about lesson-planning — «how they do it in Canada». I outlined two strategies that I have used, both in my own teaching and in writing curriculum with classroom teachers, a predetermined lesson plan and one that is more open and divergent. The teachers were intrigued with the idea of letting a sequence of lessons evolve according to the accomplishments and expressed interests of the children, with the teacher responding to rather than directing their inquiry. This, I believe, is a central idea of good teaching, especially of a culture-based bilingual/bicultural education that is to be appropriate for particular students in a particular community. How else to respond genuinely to the children in the classroom? We concluded the workshop on this note, hoping to continue our collaboration by mail until a future meeting.

STUDENTS OF AYMARA: LINGUISTS AND HISTORIANS

Another small group at THOA is studying the Aymara language itself from a linguistic and cultural point of view. I worked with a man who is writing a booklet about the phonology of Aymara, designed for those learning to read and write the language. Here my role was that of a listener and responder, exactly as I had suggested to the rural teachers, and I was able to help him clarify both his ideas and his prose. (I actually found myself editing written Spanish!) I showed him how to take advantage of the Macintosh, too, in formatting the book. We worked mainly on a section with diagrams showing how each sound of Aymara is produced, including the point and manner of articulation and written descriptions of what distinguishes each sound from the others.

He wants to give the book a cultural slant, so we brainstormed a number of ideas. He had helped students distinguish (in their writing) velar /k/ from post-velar /q/ by calling them members of two families, one near and the other remote (a fundamental Andean dichotomy) and had considered working into this scenario the way in which the sounds of the vowels /i/ and /u/ are influenced by /k/ and /q/, perhaps when the vowels «go to live» with one of these consonants.[10] But he soon decided that this kind of artificial cultural content was inappropriate in his book. Better to include, as he has, information about how a sound is used to create words in the language; for example, the sound of /t/ is a frequent choice for creating onomatopœia. We also talked about developing a cultural approach for the text, but had to face the fact that a textbook is not a natural Aymara artifact, and that the approach is therefore best left didactic, with as much cultural information included as the topic permits.

Two other researchers at THOA have been writing a history of the village of Ch'ililaya, on the shore of Lake Titicaca. Both are students at UMSA and each is looking for a way to use research data as the basis for an undergraduate thesis in linguistics. One has written extensively, on the basis of interviews, about apparitions which appear near the lake, usually in the form of animals — a white dog which materializes in a breaking wave, or two bulls seen fighting in a thick fog but found later to have been transformed into huge boulders. We talked about how she might make a dialectical and etymological study based on the names of these and many other apparitions, which not only vary from community to community, but also seem unlike other Aymara words.

The other researcher has written the history of Ch'ililaya from the 1870s to the 1950s in the form of a *radionovela* script. This slant, together with his interest in developing a linguistic study that will be useful to students of Aymara, led us to the idea of examining everyday spoken Aymara. His study might reveal some of the characteristics of this language, would help students of Aymara as a second language to speak more naturally, and would even help him write more spontaneous-sounding dialogue in future *radionovelas*.

SPEAKERS OF UCHUMATAQU

About a year ago, a man (the father and husband of two participants in the writers' workshop) from the Uru community of Iro Hito, west of La Paz, came to THOA after hearing on the radio how the group was developing Aymara and Quechua language texts. He asked for help in recording Uchumataqu, the language of the Urus, and creating teaching materials so that it could be introduced in the community school. Today there are only eight speakers of Uchumataqu in Iro Hito, and he, at 50, is the youngest. As a result of years of intermarriage and of being surrounded by Aymara neighbours, everyone in

the community now speaks Aymara. The same or a closely related language may be spoken by Urus living in Oruro[11] Department, south of La Paz, but it seems that no one in Iro Hito knows whether or not this is the case.

Accompanying him to La Paz each week were an elder (another writers' workshop participant) who speaks only Uchumataqu and Aymara and who would be the principal informant for the dictionary project, and the teacher from Iro Hito, who took part in the teachers' workshop and has an ongoing interest in exploring his Uru heritage. Research had been underway for several months when I arrived and had already resulted in a long list of Uchumataqu words, concentrating especially on vocabulary relating to parts of the body, since the group felt this would be a suitable topic for didactic materials at the primary level.

My role in the project was as technical assistant, when it came to entering the collection of words into the computer so that they could be alphabetized and edited. (We used FileMaker II, which I am currently using for a Passamaquoddy-Maliseet dictionary in Maine and New Brunswick). I also helped the man who had initiated the project transfer his delightful MacPaint drawings of local birds, fish, and artifacts to a larger format so as to create demonstration teaching materials. Because the principal informant and I had no language in common, I was unable to do more than listen in and indicate directions for word collecting. I did, however, suggest that the researchers concentrate on fishing and bird-hunting, the two chief activities in which everyone in Iro Hito, including children, is engaged, rather than such an academic topic as body-parts. Language learning is more inviting when the lessons draw on children's activities rather than isolated vocabulary with no compelling context.

By mid-March, we had collected some 900 words, along with Aymara and Spanish definitions, and there were a dozen drawings with caption sentences in Uchumataqu. Arrangements had been made for a group from THOA to visit Iro Hito in order to present these to the community and discuss with them the idea of initiating Uchumataqu language instruction in the school. Although the idea of teaching Uchumataqu in the school was not received with immediate enthusiasm, this trip proved to be one of the most memorable experiences of my stay in Bolivia. (The trip is described in detail in a diary entry appended to this report.)

* * *

ESCUCHANDO NO MAS APRENDI

Near the end of my stay in Bolivia, on 18 and 19 March, I met twice with THOA staff as a group to review what we had done during the previous eight weeks. For the first of these two meetings, I was asked to talk about my own work experience in Canada, and my observations of the strategies used by THOA. At the second, I presented a summary of my work, which was augmented by the others with whom I had worked. *Escuchando no más,* I had learned a great deal — just by listening and just by encouraging talk. I returned to North America with a broader understanding of education, of what people learn and how they live and grow within their communities, and of what a culture-based education for native children might mean. β

APPENDIX:
DIARY ENTRY FOR 16 MARCH 1991: TRIP TO IRO HITO

We drove out of the city and past Tiwanaku to Guaqui, on the south shore of Lake Titicaca, where we stopped for breakfast at about nine o'clock — *sajta de pollo,* a stewed chicken dish and very good. Afterward, we walked around in the Saturday feria, where we bought fruit, bread, and other foods to take along to Iro Hito. After Guaqui the road deteriorates markedly, in some places hardly meriting the name: sticky mud in great holes and deep ruts, through which the Wagoneta slithered like a foundering barge. After the first of two very bad stretches, we stopped for a few minutes. The silence of the countryside was astonishing and peaceful. No other trucks, no electric wires, just the sounds of distant farm animals and the breeze on the grass. Two hours on, we arrived to an Iro Hito even quieter. No one in sight. A bus was waiting to depart for Guaqui and La Paz, and a few children peered at us over adobe walls as we settled ourselves on the grass by the school while one of the young Uru women, who had traveled with us from La Paz went off to her house to report our arrival.

Three of our group played songs on the charango and guitar as the noon-hour wore on. Gradually people appeared to say hello and to sit down and share a lime or chew coca leaves — the activity of sociable relaxation. First came the «secretary general» or head authority of the community, followed by other, younger men. It was very warm and bright in the sun, and after the bus departed, again the country silence. A burro brayed on the hour, or so we joked, and the cows lowed contentedly. Gaff-rigged sailboats far away moved imperceptibly across the lake.

Eventually our friend returned and we walked to her house for lunch. A compound with an adobe wall and several small buildings, one a kitchen, others for sleeping. Outside, a *miji,* a black cormorant with turquoise eyes and white feet, was tethered by one leg. A pet? No, to be sold for medicine: *hay*

que tomar la sangre caliente — one must drink the blood still warm. I took a picture but wished I hadn't.

We entered a one-room adobe building with a dirt floor and thatched roof. There was a table in the centre, opposite the door, and a bed on each side, tucked up against an end wall. A basin was provided and we washed our hands using a cup for a dipper, a ritual which had gained importance from the cholera scare. None of the family joined us to eat, but our host served us lunch, bowls of *wallaqi* with clear broth, potato and *chuñu*. Soon he returned with extra fish, but four were enough for me; *wallaqi* are rich and bony and hard to manage. Our host gracious but shy, like his wife and, though to a lesser extent, his daughter. After eating, we walked back to the school to wait for the meeting about the language project to begin. By this time it had clouded over and turned cold.

The village lies along the shore of the Desaguedero River, which flows south from Lake Titicaca. Just below the outlet the river widens out again, forming a small, shallow lake, and Iro Hito lies on the eastern shore. The village is an organic group of household compounds. All the buildings and walls are made of mud-and-straw adobe, so that the general impression is of houses sprung up from the earth. The grass and other vegetation barely hide the soil. The school, which takes students from grades one to three, is, like many rural básicos in Bolivia, built of concrete and painted light blue. It is green inside, with a totora-mat ceiling and two-pupil benches in three long files. School hasn't quite yet started, so the room is dusty with the ever-present earth that filters into buildings and fabrics. A huge map of Bolivia hangs at the back — even this doesn't show Iro Hito — and the Bolivian coat of arms and colonial heroes at the front. A glass-doored cabinet at the left is labeled biblioteca and holds a few textbooks. There are dusty windows and a cement floor patterned like stones. As at noon, we wait for about an hour for people to arrive and furniture to be arranged. Our host bangs with a stone on the piece of rail suspended as a school-bell, and the clang is piercing and deafening. Two of our friends check out their home villages on the map, and one fisherman says it would take five days or more by water to travel there. Of course, he means without a motor, since no gasoline is available this far out in the country.

Eventually the schoolroom fills with adults and a few children; more people arrive as the meeting progresses. Three women come in and sit on the floor near the front. Each newcomer greets those already there, usually walking around and shaking hands or exchanging a stylized embrace. The meeting is conducted entirely in Aymara and quite formally, with people requesting *la palabra* and addressing by title the THOA spokesman (as *Señor Licenciado*) or the secretary general. Each of the THOA group says a few words. At the end, someone wants to hear more about or from me, and I explain my presence and my experience with similar language revival attempts. Here my Spanish

is better than it was earlier in the meeting. I still cannot achieve the eloquent courtesy with which other speakers grace their contributions. After I have finished, a man, addressing me as *Señor Catedrático*, asks me whether I can support or find support for a program in Iro Hito, should they decide to undertake one. Someone seconds the suggestion. I feel on the spot, perhaps unnecessarily, and say I will be talking about that with them. As I learn later, the proposal to offer Uchumataqu lessons in the school has been received rather coolly by the community, and much discussion lies ahead if there is to be such a program.

After the meeting, we take a cup of *café con leche*, made with rich, fresh milk, served with a crusty roll, and then we go down to the shore to see a *balsa* (totora-reed boat) and ride in one of the sailboats, an open wooden hull with short mast, poled by another of our young friends from the village. The shore is simply the bottom of a sloping cow pasture disappearing into the water, and the boat is pulled up into a gap in the dirt. By this time it is seven o'clock and getting dark. A rosy sunset in the west is limited to a small patch of sky over the water. The brown and warm green shoreline, silent as ever, a line of totora off to the northwest, and the lowing of cows along the ridge paralleling the water's edge. No lights visible. In the distance, to the north, west, and southwest, the grey forms of sharp-edged mountains, and the water mirror flat. Our friend tells us she has been managing boats since she was six, and it shows. At first she poles us out past a floating balsa. Then she goes forward and sits ahead of the mast to row. My THOA colleague takes up the pole, but he gets no purchase — not because the water deepens, but because our pilot is pulling so fast. After a bit we turn back to a small clump of floating totora, not much different in appearance from a little island, except that it offers no footing. It is covered with birds; the larger ones head off when we bump into the reeds, but the smaller ones, like redwing-blackbirds but without epaulets, are unfazed. We return to the shore and climb the hill to the school again, for the evening meeting, just as it is getting dark. This meeting is devoted entirely to an extended *waxt'a*, a ceremony of offerings to Pacha Mama,[12] conducted by one of the elders.

First a man arrives with a gas lantern which he mounts on a pipe atop a keg-sized gas cylinder. He works by the light of a candle and a small, open-flame oil lamp. Our host and his son work at it, too, and finally get it going, but not at full brightness. Our host is wearing his traditional full-length poncho, woven of natural colours and sewn up the sides to form a cylindrical tunic, and a multicolour knitted hat with earflaps that say «1990». Meanwhile, the guitar and charango players keep up the music, much to the pleasure of the children. Soon the elder arrives with heavy, woven blankets for the visitors; and other men and women come in with mattresses and sheepskins to sleep on. I claim one of each and sit on a bench in the corner, covering my legs to keep warm. Soon, though, I am moved to the row of visitors along one side of the classroom — although I am actually colder there in the draft from the

door; but everyone is kindly insisting I move to the mattresses. As it turns out, I have a ringside seat, right next to the elder who will conduct the *waxt'a*.

She begins her preparations by spreading out an *awayu* on the floor and kneeling beside it, her back to the wall. She is wearing her green *manta* and a close-fitting dark blue hood. She unpacks everything from the plastic bags (called «nylons» in Bolivia) brought from La Paz and lays it out on the cloth — cellophane packets of *confites* (white and bright pink candies, very light and smooth, made especially for ceremonial use in all shapes from blocks to animals, hearts, and pellets); greenish-grey herbs wrapped in newspaper with the fine, dry kidney-fat of llama; red wine; coca leaves (these produced by various persons from nylons and folded cloths); strands of unspun wool in rainbow hues; small wooden bowls to hold copal and other incense ground with a stone mortar and pestle; and sheets of blank newsprint which she tears into rectangular pieces about the size of stationery by folding them and running a safety pin point down the crease. When it appears that there aren't enough sheets, I find two in my bag. Then the ceremony begins.
She places four sheets of paper on a clean sack spread over the *awayu* and begins to sprinkle them with a coca leaf dipped in red wine, all the time keeping up a soft prayer in Aymara on behalf of the community (I hear the word *comunidad* repeatedly) and its work. Next she asks chief members of our group to repeat the ritual, then me — and so on until all the visitors, authorities (including spouses), and other adults have taken part. This pattern is repeated for virtually every step of the *waxt'a;* eventually the children take part, too, though not with the wine. After everyone has sprinkled wine on the papers, the elder in charge, still praying, takes three *confites* and arranges them on the first sheet of paper, in the centre, a block in the middle and two round shapes, one on either side. Then she gives a small handful of confites to us and the others. We are told to hold these close to our hearts and pass them over our bodies before placing them on the paper. Some people take great pains in the placement, selecting the positions on the paper with care, or equally carefully letting the confites fall where they will. One by one we go up to place them.

This is how we fill the sheets of paper, beginning with the one closest to the elder, on her right.

1 She begins by placing a small quantity of *confites* or herbs with llama fat in the centre, then she distributes little handfuls to the participants.

2 Participants position their contributions on the paper after passing them over chest and face, etc., often with a prayer of their own to accompany the elder's.

3 She places the remaining *confites* or herbs on the (by now substantial) pile on the paper

4 Once the four sheets are completed — two each of *confites* and herbs — she and each participant select six intact coca leaves and place three of them on each pile of *confites*. She adds carnations as well.

5 She makes a «rainbow» from selected strands of unspun coloured wool, pressed loosely together, which she then places in a ring around each pile of confites.

6 She then makes two small packets of incense, wrapped in newspaper and bound loosely with additional wool.

7 Provided with two plates, she places on each one a sheet with the herbs, loosely bunched up, a sheet of *confites*, and a package of incense (all to be burned later since it is raining outside and the offering cannot be burned indoors).

After the first round of *confites* is finished, the elder has two boys distribute the *confites* or herbs to all before placement begins and the people form a line rather than coming up one at a time to take part. Still, the whole *waxt'a* takes about two hours. Then there is a break, during which music is played and everyone rests and changes the coca leaves they have been chewing. All the coca has to be preserved so that everything used in the ceremony can be burnt in the offering. Then the entire *waxt'a* is repeated once more.

During the ceremony, some people are quiet and thoughtful, others conversing, even laughing among themselves, but everyone is respectful of the ceremony itself, even the children. It continues dark in the room and everyone chews great handfuls and cheekfuls of coca. During the break, some lime juice with rum is served in tiny plastic glasses. Children begin to leave. The second round begins with many of the visitors nodding off between turns. I stay awake, but fall asleep soon after the end, during resumed music. I remember someone's putting more blankets over me. At one point during the second part I went outside; the stars were incredibly dense and big, the Big Dipper exactly upside-down on the northern horizon. Later, when I woke up and went outside again, it had clouded over, but a few fist-sized stars showed through the seams.

We woke up at six-thirty, washed our faces at the pump below the school, and had left the village by seven o'clock. Straight back to La Paz over the same miserable road, but a faster trip this time, or so it seemed. The driver was due back for a ten-o'clock football game.

IRO HITO, PROVINCIA INGAVI, BOLIVIA

Out of this time and out of my ken. Real life lived without electricity or motors — only radio batteries and infrequent public transportation. So there's Don L— coming to La Paz to draw birds and balsas with MacPaint and going home to his cheerful adobe and dirt-floor house to eat wallaqi and fish for it in the serene Desaguedero. The small lake below the outlet of Titicaca is flat and grey in the twilight of evening or dawn and hardly even laps at the grazed slopes that come down to it. Farmyard smells but arctic vistas and colours — a neutral earth brown, warm and very damp, sage greens. Nowhere does the green cover the ground, neither lush nor leafy; yet it seems very much alive, like moss always ready to soak and grow, even at the driest times. The adobe houses, each in a walled compound, are part of the ground and also seem ready to grow again. There are walls half built and walls half fallen, doorways bricked up and little open courtyards without doors at all. Tethered cows and burros. People are rare, solitary spots of colour crossing from one house to another on foot or bicycle. The women wear bright polleras and mantas and carry vivid awayus on their backs. The men in almost invisible clothing, neutral in style and colour — but here is the village teacher with his chartreuse shirt and another man with red socks above his sneakers. The general authority of the community wears a knit hat with earflaps under his sombrero and he carries under his arm a bright ch'uspa filled with coca leaves. I step into a schoolboy's clay model: traditional altiplano village, date undetermined.

Waxt'a at the school after dark, an offering to Pacha Mama. The darkness of course is thick, not even spots of light in distant windows, but only the stars crowding the sky in bumpy confusion. Inside the schoolhouse the frustrating light of one candle an open oil flame and a gas-lamp. Sometimes people enter with a glass-paned candle lantern, but this is snuffed at once. People around the room. The visitors on a row of sheepskins and mattresses shrouded in heavy woven blankets. The community authorities in their striped wool ponchos and knit hats in the school benches toward the back. Further forward along the side, their wives sit on the floor on sheepskins or blankets wearing mantas and bowler hats. Quiet conversations among the men and women and among the visitors. In the front corner Doña J— conducting the waxt'a, Don L— beside her, alone and not involved, except in concentration — my colleague, too, at the table. Coca keeps appearing in all parts of the room and is shared by the handful from bright cloths and thin green «nylons». The night continues drowsily and vividly, from the dark corners to the bright magenta sugar-candies in Doña J—'s lap. The visitors doze, the authorities watch and talk, the children feel at home. ❧

NOTES

[1]Altiplano: the vast plain lying at an altitude of about 4000 m, between the eastern and western ranges of the Andes in western Bolivia, extending southward from Lake Titicaca. The northwestern part of the Altiplano crosses into Chile and Perú.

[2]Aymara: An indigenous people of South America, numbering between two and three million, living mainly in western Bolivia, and also in southeastern Perú and northern Chile. Most speak both Aymara (a member of the Jaqi family of languages) and Spanish, though some are monolingual in one language or the other.

[3]THOA: Taller de Historia Oral Andina (the acronym is pronounced TOE-ah).

[4]The publications mentioned here are —

Huanca L., Tomás. *Jilirinaksan arsüwipa: Testimonios de nuestros mayores.* La Paz, THOA, 1991.

_____. *El yatiri en la comunidad aymara.* La Paz, Ediciones CADA, 1989.

Huanca L., Tomás, et al. *El indio Santos Marka T'ula.* La Paz, THOA, 1984

Mamani C., Carlos. *Metodología de la historia oral.* La Paz, THOA, 1989.

Rivera C., Silvia, et al. *La mujer andina en la historia.* La Paz, THOA, 1990.

_____. *Mujer y resistencia comunaria: Historia y memoria.* La Paz, Hisbol, 1986.

[5]This language, also known as Uru-Chipaya or Uru-Pukina (there may be other dialects), is not related to Aymara or Quechua, and in the Department of La Paz is used by only a few speakers in the small community of Iro Hito, on the Desaguedero River, where Aymara is the predominant language. One of these speakers, having heard of the work of THOA through a broadcast on an Aymara radio station, came to the THOA offices to seek help in reviving his language.

[6]I worked until 19 March and held a final meeting at THOA on 01 April, after twelve days' vacation with my wife in Bolivia and northern Chile.

[7]Thanks to Arlene Stairs, of Queen's University, who has developed a set of questions for use with the Inuit of northern Canada; these questions I adapted and translated for use in the workshop in La Paz.

[8]In a number of Aymara, Quechua, and Guaraní communities in Bolivia, UNICEF has been sponsoring a Program of Intercultural and Bilingual Education (PEIB), which is now entering its second year. About 100 teachers at the grade one and two levels are participating, and a number of primers and other teaching materials have been published. The teachers working with THOA are not part of PEIB.

[9]Urban schools in Bolivia have different materials, as well as a longer school year with shorter hours, and — generally — better paid and more highly qualified teachers.

[10]In Aymara, the combinations ki and ku are pronounced like (keh) and (koh), respectively; i and e, o and u are allophone pairs. First-language Aymara-speakers often confuse the vowels in each pair when writing Spanish — writing *vucal* instead of *vocal*, for example.

[11]Iro Hito and Oruro are both place-names derived from the word Uru — Iro is a variation and Oruro comes from Uru Uru. Hito is a Spanish word meaning «landmark» or «milestone».

[12]Pacha Mama is roughly equivalent to Mother Earth; in Andean spirituality she also has a male counterpart.